

Theological Reflection on Diversity and Inclusion



Diversity & Inclusion Team

The Salvation Army is committed to inclusion and diversity.

“Social inclusion is an active process of welcome, integration, adaptation and ongoing change. Inclusive practices should allow all people to belong, feel informed, connected and contribute to society, socially, culturally, politically and economically. Social inclusion is about removing barriers to make sure everyone can contribute and participate and have equal access to opportunities.” (The Salvation Army Social Inclusion and Diversity Policy)

Inclusion is being welcoming to all people... We value the diverse skills and perspectives people bring, Diversity brings a richness to society.

Inclusion is being welcoming to all people, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, looks, language, ability or anything else that divides people, is able to participate equally in all aspects of society.

“Diversity takes into account the differences between people and respects the diversity of perspective and contribution of all people. TSA values the diverse skills and perspectives people bring to its operations, mission expressions, and the workplace through their gender, gender identity, age, language, ethnicity, cultural background, disability, religious belief, sexual orientation and marital status.” (The Salvation Army Social Inclusion and Diversity Policy)

Diversity is the understanding that people are diverse in ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, looks, language, beliefs, abilities, and a range of other things, and that this diversity brings a richness to society that allows a variety of viewpoints, strengths, and wisdom that benefits all.

Inclusion

Scripture, from the very beginning, affirms the value and worth of all people. “Scripture reveals that God values and loves the total human family equally (Ephesians 3:14-15). Humanity is created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). Every human individual has God’s divine imprint on them (Genesis 9:6). ‘From one man he made all the nations’ (Acts 17:26). While every human individual is marked by sin (Romans 3:23), God wants all to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). God shows no partiality (1 Peter 1:17; Acts 10:34).” (Salvation Army Positional Statement on Racism, 2017)

“The idea that the people of Israel are God’s ‘chosen people’ is biblically important, but it is an idea that has too often been misused. Scripture declares that Israel was chosen by God, not because of its inherent superiority (Deuteronomy 7:7), but to be a light to all humankind and a people through whom the Saviour of the world would come (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6).” (Salvation Army Positional Statement on Racism, 2017)

Moreover, Jewish law has specific provisions to ensure that the foreigner and alien are to be treated with justice and hospitality. “God who was refuge, shelter, provider and comforter for the people of ancient Israel, makes it clear that his people are to remember their flight to freedom and safety and extend a welcome to others in their time of need: ‘[God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt’ (Deuteronomy 10:18-19 NIV).” (Salvation Army Positional Statement on Refugees and Asylum Seekers, 2016)

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Jesus' teaching, including the parable of the good Samaritan, along with the experiences of the early church recorded in the book of Acts, shows an expanding view that all may be included in the kingdom of God, and that the gospel is inclusive of everyone. In older Salvation Army language, the gospel is for the "whosoever". An inclusive gospel demands an inclusive church, where all may find the love of God, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or anything else that divides people.

Christian inclusion is greater than tolerance. While there is value in maintaining a tolerant society, the Christian ideal, found in the teaching of Jesus, and especially evident in the first epistle of John, is that of love. Since God first loved us, we should love one another. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves, with the definition of neighbour stretched by Jesus to include everyone with whom we may have contact. Christians will do more than merely tolerate those who are different, we are called to love them, and embrace them.

**Christian inclusion is
greater than tolerance...it
is love.**

To be inclusive, then is to welcome the other as family, and even to welcome the other as a representative of Christ himself, as Jesus taught in Matthew 25:31-46.

Diversity

While Inclusion is about welcoming, Scripture's teaching on diversity talks about God's plan. According to 1 Corinthians 12, all of God's people together make up the Body of Christ, with every person holding a special place with unique gifts for the express purpose of building up the body. Diversity within the Church is not just an ideal based on love, it is the plan for the fully functioning body of Christ. Mono-cultural churches are not complete. When any people group are excluded from full participation in the life of the church, including leadership, then the church is poorer for it, and falls short of the ideals for the body of Christ set out in Scripture. The ideal of the church is diversity, as each person, with their rich background of abilities, culture, language, world view, and wisdom, bring these gifts to Christ, so that working together the Church of God becomes all that it is meant to be.

**Diversity is God's pattern for the
church...and a healthy society.**

Diversity in the church is not just an effective way to operate in a modern diverse society, it is God's pattern for the church, and by extension, a healthy society.

Diversity requires members to show extra love as they come to appreciate different cultures and world views. Multi-cultural communities do have special challenges as differences come into conflict with each other, but it is in a healthy process of working through the conflict of ideas and culture that people and relationships flourish.

One might imagine a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12, based on some of our own failings in the past: "Because I'm not white, I am no less a part of the body of Christ; Because I'm not male, I am no less able to participate in the body of Christ; Even though I'm not heterosexual, I am still created by God for His purposes; Although I'm not of a certain age, or particular demographic, I am still an important member of the body of Christ... No, if the whole body were white, male or of a certain age, then how could it function". According to this pattern, the church is richer, more effective, and closer to the ideals of the Kingdom of God, when it practices and embraces diversity.

Questions for Further Study

1. Consider the following Scripture passages. What do they suggest about inclusion?

Galatians 3:26-29

John 3:16-17

Deuteronomy 10:14-19

Isaiah 56:1-9

John 9:1-3

John 1:9-14

Luke 17:1-2

2. In what ways might people feel excluded from your church, corps or fellowship? What might you be able to do to demonstrate inclusive love?
3. What do the following passages say about diversity?

James 2:1-13

1 Corinthians 12:15-19

1 Corinthians 14:10

1 Corinthians 14:26

Romans 12:4-8

Isaiah 43:8-9

Matthew 25:31-46 (Among other meanings, could this also mean, no matter how lowly a person seems, they offer you more than you can ever offer them?)

4. Is there a glass ceiling in your church, corps or community for different groups? How are people prevented from fully participating in the life and ministry of your church, corps or worshipping community? How might you address this? What will this cost those who are already privileged?

For Further Reading see:

The Salvation Army International Positional Statement on Racism (October 2017)

The Salvation Army International Positional Statement on Refugees and Asylum Seekers (May 2016)